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ABSTRACT

A 1985 survey of Swiss military recruits, aged about 20, and a 1987 survey of comparable Swiss women concerning their attitudes toward English as a possible lingua franca for their multilingual country are reported. Samples consisted of responses from German-speaking Switzerland (1,930 males, 324 females), French-speaking Switzerland (1,133 males, 327 females), and Italian-speaking Switzerland (1,256 males, 326 females). Survey questions addressed the following: (1) the quantity of time spent in school studying English and the other foreign languages concerned; (2) preferences for a first/second language; (3) adequacy of the English learned at school; (4) expected second language use in professional career; (5) languages used for communication with another Swiss with a different native language; and (6) feelings about adoption of English as a lingua franca. Results show English is accepted as an additional language and a language for specific purposes. However, it is not yet accepted as a language for international communication despite the fact that its use in job-related and leisure-time domains makes it increasingly difficult to avoid in a multilingual setting. (MSE)

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ATTITUDES TOWARDS ENGLISH AS A POSSIBLE LINGUA FRANCA IN SWITZERLAND*

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ED 322771

In the following I am going to comment on statistical findings relating to the attitudes of young Swiss citizens towards English as a possible lingua franca in their multilingual country. The data are taken from a highly representative survey conducted in 1985, the Swiss Military Recruit Questionnaire filled in by 33,826 young males, aged ca. 20, from all parts and all social classes of Switzerland. For computer analysis a sample was taken: 1930 questionnaires from German-speaking Switzerland, 1133 from French-speaking Switzerland, 1256 from Italian-speaking Switzerland. In 1987 this survey was followed up by one of comparable young women. Here the figures are less impressive, but still representative. There are 324 women's questionnaires from German-speaking Switzerland, 327 from French-speaking Switzerland, and 326 from Italian-speaking Switzerland. Although data on Romantch speakers are also available, they are not considered here. They are too small a group to allow direct comparison.[1]

The term 'lingua franca' may need some clarification. The following labels for English are available: English as a native language, English as a second language, English as an additional language, English as an international language, English as a foreign language. In

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[1] Full information on the questionnaire, time allotted for answering, surveillance and controlling, as well as on the statistical procedures are available from the 'Languages in Switzerland' Project, Deutsches Seminar der Universität Basel, Clarastrasse 13, CH-4058 BASEL. A full report is scheduled for publication in 1990.

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Switzerland English is neither a native nor a second language, i.e. it is not the mother-tongue of the majority of the population (nor even of a sizeable minority), nor is it the language picked up by a minority speaking a different language as would be the case in an overwhelmingly English-speaking country. But English in Switzerland qualifies for all the other category labels.

English is an additional language if used within a country, often for educational purposes, also as a medium of education, especially at secondary and tertiary levels. Professional, scientific, even literary texts may be written in English. English may be used for intra-national communication between communities in the country that do not share the same mother tongue. The interaction between English as an additional language and these mother tongues may, in the course of time, produce so-called indigenized varieties of English, local forms of English. Of course, Switzerland is not India and not Nigeria, to quote two countries in which English is used as an additional language. There is no official status for English in Switzerland. But the linguistic diversity of the country surely encourages the use of English for intra-national purposes, especially if English is already used as an international and foreign language.

English as an international language is used for communication with countries abroad, for international contact in various domains. Like so many other countries in the modern world, Switzerland uses English as an international language in business, trade, politics and science contacts with other countries.

English as a foreign language occurs where English has no particular status or function within or outside the country. This is the traditional place of English in Switzerland: knowledge of English gives access to the culture, civilization and literature of the English-speaking nations.

By adopting the term 'lingua franca' I want to suggest right away that the status of English within multilingual Switzerland is moving from that of a mere foreign language to that of a language that has po-

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tential, not only for international communication, but also for intra-national communication. This development is generally perceived as unsettling the traditional linguistic stability of multilingual Switzerland. Communication between the different language groups has been ensured by enforced bilingualism. Ideally every Swiss would have at least a two-language repertoire, like this:

	L1	L2	L3	L4
German Speaker	German	French	Italian	English
	German	French	English	Italian
French Speaker	French	German	Italian	English
	French	German	English	Italian
Italian Speaker	Italian	French	German	English
	Italian	French	English	German

so that two speakers from different language areas would at least have one Swiss national language in common. The threat to this solution seems to come from the possibility that English might be moved to the second position in the language repertoires of Swiss speakers:

	L1	L2	L3	L4
German speakers	German	ENGLISH	French	Italian
French speakers	French	ENGLISH	German	Italian
Italian speakers	Italian	ENGLISH	French	German

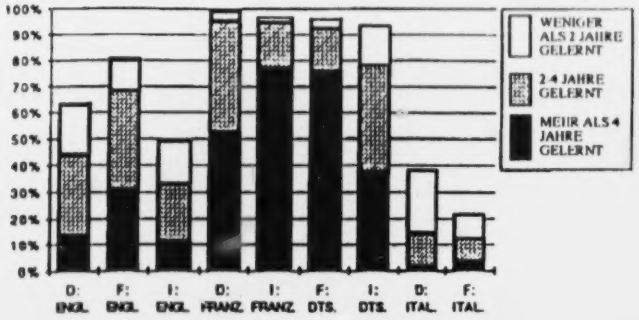
so that a non-national language would become the instrument of intra-national communication, and English could be truly termed the lingua franca of multi-lingual Switzerland.

The 1985 and 1987 data show that the traditional Swiss way of ensuring intra-national communication is still being applied, and it probably still works. But people are no longer satisfied with learning a second national language only, as they have to; a lot of them also want to

learn English: between 40% and 55% of the men and between 50% and 80% of the women have also learnt English. This at the cost of yet another national language. The time and energy invested in English language learning might also be seen as being missing in the study of the second national language.

The situation in Italian-speaking Switzerland seems to be different from that in German- or French-speaking Switzerland. The Italian speakers are in a minority position (4.4% of the total Swiss population) and thus feel a greater practical need to acquire not only a second, but also a third national language. English therefore comes last among what were called *Fremdsprachen* (not simply foreign languages, but also different Swiss languages) in the survey.

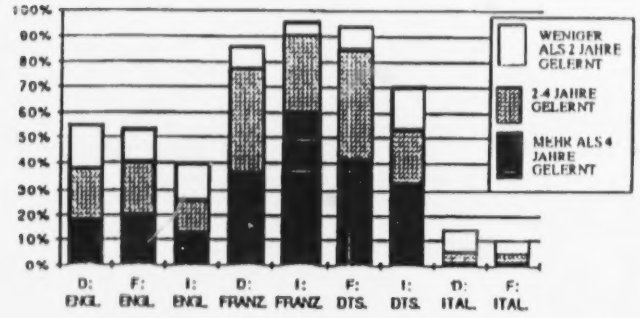
HOW LONG DID YOU STUDY OR HAVE YOU BEEN STUDYING THE FOLLOWING FOREIGN LANGUAGES AT SCHOOL? FEMALE RESPONSES:
WIE LANGE HABEN SIE DIE FOLGENDEN FREMDSPRACHEN IN DER SCHULE GELERNT?



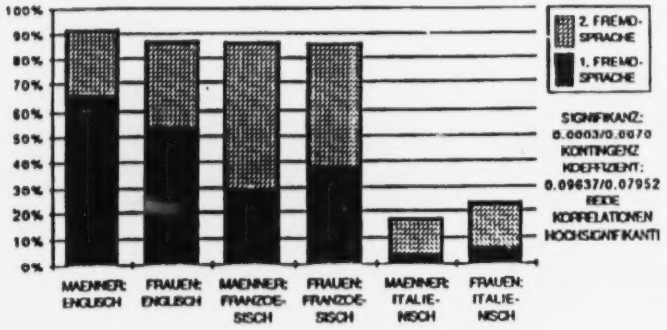
The fear of politicians and language purists that English is invading Switzerland is not without foundation. And the 20-year-old would indeed like to have the possibility of learning English right away. If English tuition were available earlier, most of the Swiss from German and French speaking Switzerland would take up English as the second language in their repertoires; German/French would drop to third posi-

tion. If given this option, even the Italian Swiss would select English first; but French and German are not as far behind as the comparable Swiss national languages in German- and French-speaking Switzerland.

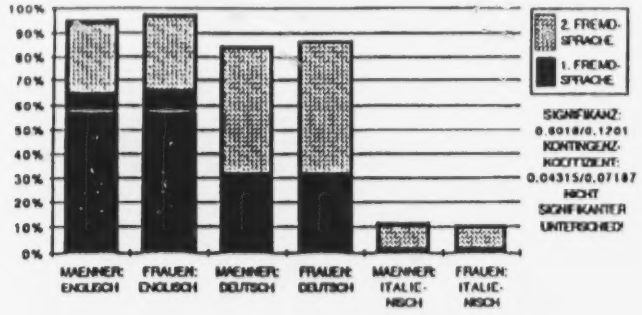
HOW LONG DID YOU STUDY OR HAVE YOU BEEN STUDYING THE FOLLOWING FOREIGN LANGUAGES AT SCHOOL? MALE RESPONSES:
WIE LANGE HABEN SIE DIE FOLGENDEN FREMDSPRACHEN IN DER SCHULE GELERNT?



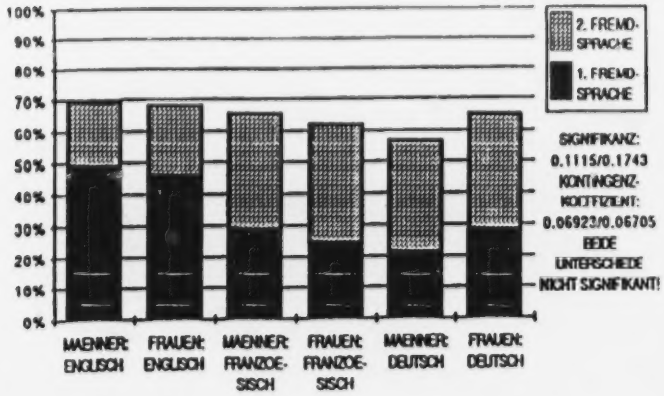
GERMAN QUESTIONNAIRES: WHICH LANGUAGE WOULD YOU PREFER TO LEARN AT SCHOOL AS A FIRST/SECOND FOREIGN LANGUAGE?
DEUTSCHE FRAGEBOGEN: ANTEILE DER PROBANDEN, DIE IN DER SCHULE ALS ERSTE/ZWEITE FREMDSPRACHE FOLGENDE SPRACHEN WÜNSCHEN:



FRENCH QUESTIONNAIRES: WHICH LANGUAGE WOULD YOU PREFER TO LEARN AT SCHOOL AS A FIRST/SECOND FOREIGN LANGUAGE?
FRANZÖSISCHE FRAGEBOGEN: ANTEILE DER PROBANDEN, DIE IN DER SCHULE ALS ERSTE/ZWEITE FREMDSPRACHE FOLGENDE SPRACHEN WÜNSCHEN:

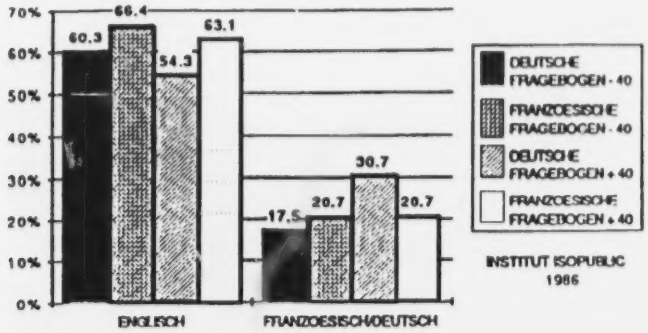


ITALIAN QUESTIONNAIRES: WHICH LANGUAGE WOULD YOU PREFER TO LEARN AT SCHOOL AS A FIRST/SECOND FOREIGN LANGUAGE?
ITALIENISCHE FRAGEBOGEN: ANTEILE DER PROBANDEN, DIE IN DER SCHULE ALS ERSTE/ZWEITE FREMDSPRACHE FOLGENDE SPRACHEN WÜNSCHEN:



In 1986, the same question was asked of the general population in German- and French-speaking Switzerland, and the same trend to place English first emerged. Even people over 40 seemed to be saying that the world has changed and that English would be their preference if they could choose today.

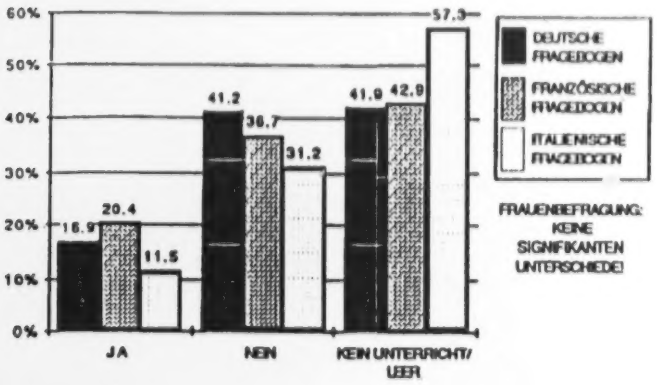
PLEASE IMAGINE THAT YOU ARE GOING TO SCHOOL AGAIN AND THAT YOU CAN SELECT FOREIGN LANGUAGES: WHICH LANGUAGE WOULD BE YOUR FIRST CHOICE? STELLEN SIE SICH BITTE FOR, SIE GEHEN NOCHMALS ZUR SCHULE UIND KÖNNEN DIE FREMDSPRACHEN WÄHLEN. WELCHE FREMDSPRACHE WÜRDEN SIE ALS ERSTE WÄHLEN?



The learning of foreign languages is considered important by 40 - 45% of the young men and about 90% of the young women. Note the enormous difference here between the sex groups! Indeed, most have learnt - have had to learn - a second language, and many even a third. Such positive answers to a question like 'Do you think that learning foreign/other languages is necessary?' are what one traditionally expects of Swiss citizens. However, the conventional assumption that Swiss language learners are motivated by the insight that they ought to know the languages of the other Swiss can no longer be made. Too obvious is the wish to see other Swiss languages in the curriculum replaced by English. The positive answers to the question are no doubt also motivated by their practical need to know English - a non-Swiss language.

This interpretation is strengthened by the indication of the young Swiss that they have not had enough English instruction at school.

DO YOU HAVE THE IMPRESSION THAT YOU LEARNED ENOUGH ENGLISH AT SCHOOL?
HABEN SIE GENÜGEND ENGLISCH GELERNT IN DER SCHULE?



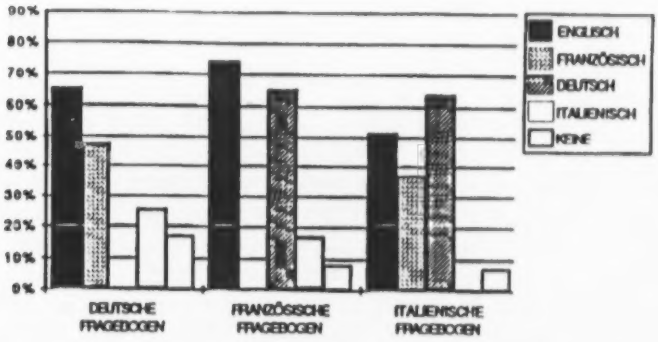
Not surprisingly, therefore, between 69% and 77% of the men and between 75% and 90% of the women think that schools should intensify foreign language instruction in English.

But why is there this clearly expressed wish for more English? With German, French and Italian, Switzerland has at its disposal very highly developed languages with long traditions and rich cultural heritages. The factors favouring the spread of English in Switzerland are the same as elsewhere in the modern world: apart from the linguistic diversity of a multilingual country, these are, particularly, material incentives and cultural affiliation (Dürmüller 1986: 11-26).

The data on the young Swiss show that already at age 20, they are expected to use in the professional sphere not only the Swiss national languages, but also English. In French and German speaking Switzerland, English is even more often required than Italian. (E: 27 - 31%, I: 12 - 20%)

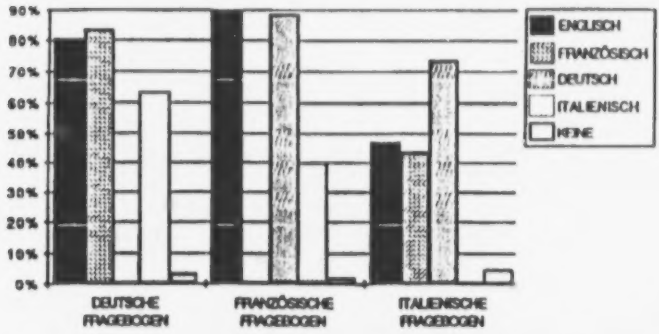
When checking on how the young Swiss see their everyday linguistic future, English came to rank very prominently as a language they expect to be using in their professional careers. English does not outshine the local Swiss languages, but it becomes obvious that it is expected to be as important as a second Swiss language. This tendency is marked especially among the women.

WHICH FOREIGN LANGUAGE DO YOU EXPECT TO USE IN YOUR PROFESSIONAL CAREER? MALE RESPONSES:
WELCHE FREMDSPRACHEN SCHEINEN IHNEN IM IHREM GEGENWÄRTIGEN ODER ZUKÜNFTIGEN BERUF BESONDERS WICHTIG ZU SEIN?



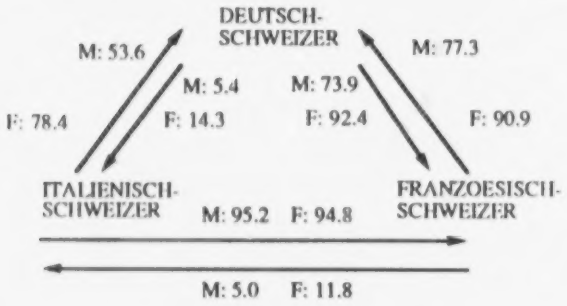
Given Switzerland's embedding within the Western world, the fact that the use of English is profession-related even within the country, cannot be surprising. English as an additional language for special purposes, might be acceptable. The question, however, is whether English might not spread further. Might it not serve the purposes of a language of wider communication, of a lingua franca? Once a substantial portion of the population speak English additionally in their workplace, can they be stopped from using it on other occasions, specifically when meeting a Swiss from a different language area?

WHICH FOREIGN LANGUAGE DO YOU EXPECT TO USE IN YOUR PROFESSIONAL CAREER? FEMALE RESPONSES:
WELCHE FREMDSPRACHEN SCHEINEN IHNEN IM IHREM GEGENWÄRTIGEN ODER ZUKÜNFTIGEN BERUF BESONDERS WICHTIG ZU SEIN?



Contact linguistic situations are quite normal for Swiss citizens - for two thirds (even 80% of the women) in our survey. But so far, no clear indications about how they communicate across the language barriers have been available. We should suppose that they are well equipped for communication in at least one other language. If we assume that a minimum period of two years of foreign/other language learning is necessary to obtain some degree of communicative competence including basic language skills, we do get the impression that Swiss bilingual education works. The arrows in the following chart show which languages that have been learnt for a minimum of two years are available to which percentage of young men (M) or women (F) when contacting inhabitants of another linguistic area. For example, 78.4% of the young Italian Swiss women have enough German knowledge to communicate with people from German-speaking Switzerland, but only 5.4% of the German-speaking males have a comparable competence in Italian.

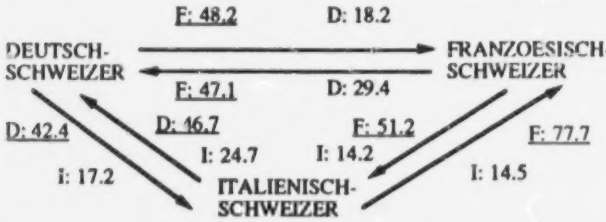
PERCENTAGE OF SPEAKERS TAUGHT OTHER SWISS NATIONAL LANGUAGES FOR A PERIOD EXCEEDING TWO YEARS:
ANTEIL PROBANDEN, DIE DIE SPRACHE DER ANDEREN SPRACHREGIONEN DER SCHWEIZ LÄNGER ALS ZWEI JAHREN IN DER SCHULE GELERNT HABEN:



The chart illustrates that communication in one language channel at least should always work. It also shows that the minority group of the Italian Swiss carry the heaviest burden in this intra-national communication scheme: to a large extent they have acquired not only one other Swiss language, but both French and German!

English doesn't do badly either: For a third of the young Swiss it might serve the purposes of a lingua franca at least theoretically. The percentages are between 37.4 (for German-speaking males) and 67.7 (for French-speaking women). When asked whether they actually did use the other languages when together with people from different language areas, the figures began to look somewhat different. They show now that there is a bilingual imbalance between the linguistic groups of Switzerland: if Italian-speaking Swiss meet with either German- or French-speaking Swiss, the language of communication is predictably not Italian, it is either German or French. If French-speaking Swiss meet with either Italian- or German-speaking Swiss, the language of communication is predictably French, not Italian or German. The German-speaking Swiss hold a middle ground: they yield to the French speakers, but not to the Italian speakers.

WHICH LANGUAGE DO YOU USE IN COMMUNICATION WITH SWISS PEOPLE WHO SPEAK A LANGUAGE OTHER THAN YOUR MOTHER TONGUE?
IN WELCHER SPRACHE UNTERHALTEN SIE MIT ANDERSSPRACHIGEN SCHWEIZERN? IN DEN FOLGENDEN KOMMUNIKATIONSSITUATIONEN UNTER VERSCHIEDENSPRACHIGEN SCHWEIZERN SIND DIE DOMINIERENDEN SPRACHEN:



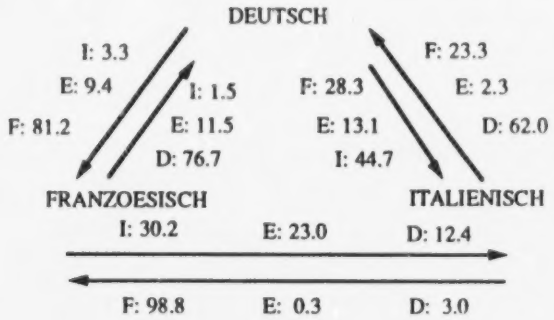
In this situation of bilingual imbalance, where one language group seems quite unwilling to use another language (the French) and another language group mostly has to use other languages (the Italian), the chances for English to be used as a language for intra-national communication may be seen as increasing. As a foreign language, English is not tied up with any particular community of Switzerland. It is a neutral tool, available to all the linguistic groups in the same way, not putting any one group at an advantage or at a disadvantage.

Already today, English is sometimes chosen as the lingua franca between speakers of different linguistic background if their mother tongue cannot be used. Of course, the second Swiss language, which was taught at school to practically all the Swiss (see above), comes first; but English is the second choice in this situation, before the third national language. With the trilingual Italian speakers, English is third choice, but with German-speaking males conversing with Italian speakers it is number one, even before French.

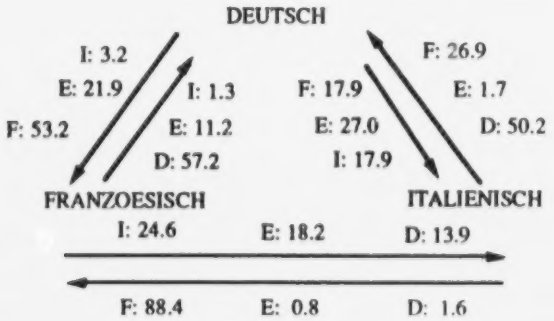
In the light of these and many more data which it was impossible to present here, the possibility that English might increasingly be used as a lingua franca in multilingual Switzerland must be taken seriously. Not many people would like to adopt English officially as an additional

language in Switzerland. Also, the 20-year-olds are clearly against an introduction of English. However, they consider it quite conceivable that one day English might be made a Swiss national language.

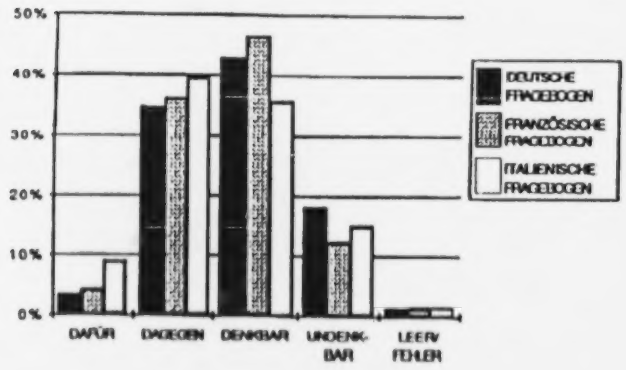
WHICH LANGUAGE DO YOU SPEAK WITH ANOTHER SWISS WHO DOES NOT SPEAK YOUR MOTHER TONGUE? FEMALE RESPONSES:
IN WELCHER SPRACHE UNTERHALTEN SIE MIT EINEM ANDERSSPRACHIGEN SCHWEIZER, DER IHREN MUTTERSPRACHE NICHT SPRICHT? FRAUEN:



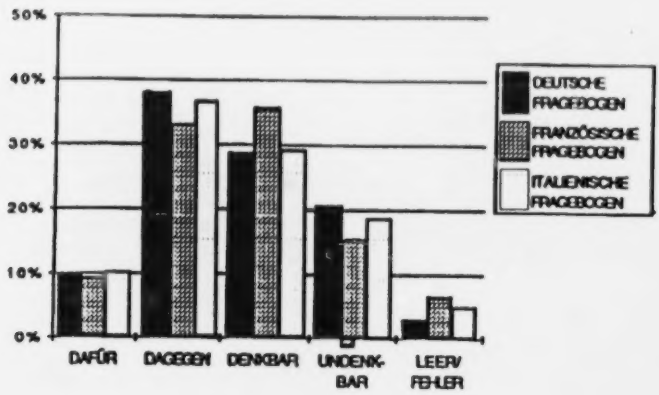
WHICH LANGUAGE DO YOU SPEAK WITH ANOTHER SWISS WHO DOES NOT SPEAK YOUR MOTHER TONGUE? MALE RESPONSES:
IN WELCHER SPRACHE UNTERHALTEN SIE MIT EINEM ANDERSSPRACHIGEN SCHWEIZER, DER IHREN MUTTERSPRACHE NICHT SPRICHT? MÄNNER:



WHAT WOULD YOU THINK OF MAKING ENGLISH A SWISS NATIONAL LANGUAGE?
FEMALE RESPONSES:
WAS MEINEN SIE ZUM VORSCHLAG, AUCH DAS ENGLISCHE ZUR OFFIZIELLEN LANDESSPRACHE ZU ERKLÄREN?



WHAT WOULD YOU THINK OF MAKING ENGLISH A SWISS NATIONAL LANGUAGE?
MALE RESPONSES:
WAS MEINEN SIE ZUM VORSCHLAG, AUCH DAS ENGLISCHE ZUR OFFIZIELLEN LANDESSPRACHE ZU ERKLÄREN?



Today Switzerland is left in a somewhat schizophrenic situation: the general population and the politicians want to preserve the traditional status of multilingual Switzerland. The idea of accepting English officially is clearly resented. Yet, a lot of English is allowed into the country through a multitude of channels. English-language movies are shown with their original sound track, and this is welcomed by the people. English-language music is on the air of Swiss radio stations all the time, and again no one would ask for translations. Swiss people claim to read as many books in English as in a second Swiss language; they write more graffiti in English than in a second Swiss language; and they do not hesitate to apply for jobs that require fluency in English.

English is accepted as an additional language, a language for specific purposes, and it is accepted as a language for international communication. However, it is not yet accepted as a language for intranational communication, although its use in job-related and leisure-time domains makes it increasingly more difficult not to resort to English as a possible lingua franca in a multilingual setting.

REFERENCE

Dürmüller, Urs. 1986. The status of English in multilingual Switzerland. *Bulletin CILA 44*. Neuchatel. 7-38.